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ABSTRACT

A combination of events have moved various colleges and universities to grant admissions to minority group students. With this change, problems have developed: Mainly that of admissions criteria as related to academic achievement. The trend has become, therefore, toward either random selection or an open door policy. No matter what the process of selection may be, if black students differ socially and culturally from traditional students, they will continue to have difficulties once admitted to a traditional collegiate program. Therefore, if new criteria can be developed to select those who have the greatest chance to succeed in the hostile environment, chances for academic success would increase. Oberlin College has set about developing such criteria. They interviewed black applicants and in addition to regular admissions criteria, the students were rated on "hipness." This concept includes competitiveness, high motivation, and self reliance. A total of three groups were admitted: 18 were not "hip" but met regular criteria; 14 were both "hip" and met regular criteria; and seven were "hip" but did not meet regular criteria. At the end of the first semester, there was no appreciable difference in the distribution of grade point average between the three groups. (KJ)

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THE OLD SYSTEM AND THE NEW COLLEGE STUDENTS

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A combination of events have moved various colleges and universities to grant admissions to minority group students. Along with independent recognition, Federal and private monies have spurred many institutions to consciously seek these students to broaden the "student base" with mutual benefits for all. It is usually expected that minority students will benefit from education of a higher level, and that their presence and participation in such education can broaden the understandings and actions of other students regarding cooperative actions under accepted differences. Yet, it is usually the case that large disparities exist between the performance of these students and those who have traditionally attended these institutions.

The problem is one of novelty. It is no overstatement to say that minority (specifically Black) students represent a population for whom institutions of higher learning lack standardized norms for admission, as well as effective educational programs for their motivation and instruction. A study by the American Council on Education noted that Black students continued to constitute 6 per cent of Freshman enrollment for 1969. At the same time, in private non-sectarian colleges, enrollment jumped from 9 to 19 per cent and in private universities rose from about 3 to 15 per cent.

This increase has not been without problems as noted in a recent issue of Negro Digest entitled, "Toward A Black University." Additionally, there has been a tremendous rise in the number of conferences addressing the topic of the "disadvantaged students." Let us look at some of the problems. There is an abundance of literature pointing to a cultural bias

in standardized testing used for admissions, and upon cursory inspection it would appear that teacher recommendations, recruiter interview-ratings, grades, and other factors exhibit the same bias. Likewise, it is well known that the correlation between standardized test scores and academic achievement is not particularly impressive, and the same probably holds true for any alternate combinations of admissions criteria. There is not only a social problem arising from the use of admissions mechanisms which reflect social bias and implicit racism, but also a technical problem stemming from the lack of a specific relationship between the kinds of things measured by admissions standards and kinds of things measured by performance within a particular program of education. There are those, in the face of such evidence, who have suggested abandoning admissions criteria altogether.

Based on Alexander Astin's work and others, the trend is to move toward either random selection, or an open door policy. Astin and his colleagues have recently found evidence suggesting that most colleges could greatly increase their enrollments of minority group students without affecting their dropout rates. These findings indicate that colleges might want to replace grades and tests in admissions by a lottery system for choosing among their applicants.

Albert Logan, Jr., headlining an article The Chronicle of Higher Education, writes that nationwide admissions test appear to be losing importance. He states, "A decline in the use of tests to evaluate students against large-group norms has been forecast by William W. Turnbull of Educational Testing Service."

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has proposed the "softening" of admissions standards to help achieve "universal access" to colleges and universities in America. The rationale behind these arguments is that expanding educational opportunities enables a wide range of students to benefit from higher education. It seems strange, however, that at this point in time there would be any question about the need to expand educational opportunities.

Blacks have raised questions about the validity of admissions criteria since the early 1960's. James Brown, Black folk singer-philosopher, has profoundly stated: "Open up the door, and I'll get ^{it} myself." Black Nationalist movements have given impetus to events which have "opened up the door." After the fact, astute scholars (sociologists, commission researchers, etc.) are now supporting this policy. Another point becomes also clear; students admitted to colleges and universities with or without regard to admissions standards, do truly have to "get it themselves." It is becoming increasingly clear that admissions criteria have never been highly significant in terms of predicting a student's performance at a particular institution. Rather they have functioned to exclude applicants from the "poorer areas". What should have been important in these instances is a student's ability to deal socially with the structures represented within particular educational institutions. While admissions criteria do in fact show cultural bias in relief, a more subtle, insidious, and often debilitating form of it is represented in the very workings of the educational system. Consequently, while abandonment of present criteria is to be encouraged, it actually does nothing more than give Black students an equal chance to be unequal.

No matter what the process of selection, those meeting the social patterns of the dominant American culture are and will continue to be the most successful in existing systems of higher education. It is enough to say then, that if Black students differ (socially and culturally) from traditionally college-bound high school graduates, it may well be the case that until these differences are taken into consideration in the collegiate program, they will continue to have difficulty in matching the performance levels of their white counterparts.

While the idea that institutions will have to change significantly to address the needs of Black students is implicit in the writings of most who advocate "open admissions" policies, they are still in some sense suggesting that it be in the direction of compensatory arrangements alone. It is evident to those who have moved in this direction that there are many problems involved. One of the more important problems is a lack of a well-defined program for administering supportive or compensatory assistance. There is also the problem of the creation of feelings of inferiority, atypicality and dependency (and often open hostility) among those who are identified as needing compensatory assistance. Under compensatory arrangements, students either "suffer through" after undergoing a devastating and depressing period of academic and social difficulties or they have such negative experiences that they literally lose their desire to obtain a college education.

Experience would suggest that until legitimate recognition of dimensions of culture in terms of actual adjustments or changes in these education systems have been effected, it will be necessary to be selective--

only here we are suggesting a selection process based on criteria that will best allow these students to survive in the hostile system. On inspection, it appears that such characteristics as clear-thinking, social adeptness and the ability to communicate constitute general criteria on which one can measure a student's potential for success in the presently constituted higher education. Such general criteria in no way attempt to establish culture-free evaluation. In fact, it is probably only measurable in terms of culture.

Few would deny that being black in America gives rise to a life of unique circumstances. Logically, talent developed under such conditions, may not take on the same character as that defined by society at large. If this is true, then new criteria are needed for its measurement. At Oberlin, we accepted this assumption, and set about the task of developing new criteria. As a first approximation of talent, (as expressed in the language of "black culture") we asked that a student be "hip". Such skills and experiences as the "hip" student possesses have developed from the keen competition over the scarce number of "goodies" to be distributed among members of their community. While many students coming from these communities are often not enthusiastically engaged in "school work," they are highly motivated and self-reliant. It is assumed that in the absence of any significant changes in higher education, their high drive for self-reliance and mastery of their environment will still permit them to survive academically. They will take it upon themselves to demand educational services when they find that their needs are not being met by existing arrangements. Additionally, it is assumed that they would be less inclined to feel the stigma usually attached to students needing supplemental and

supportive assistance. In effect, it is felt that they bring with them a rich body of knowledge, skills, and experiences which give them a vantage point in the highly competitive setting of higher education.

To test these notions, in the Spring of 1969 we defined an operation which would measure "hipness" and admitted those black students who were talented into Oberlin College. (So as to be able to make comparisons, this was not done to the exclusion of regular admissions practices). In order to capitalize on the totality of cues in face-to-face communications between human beings, a fifty per cent random sample of all black applicants was invited to the campus for interviews. Additionally, since many of these "cues" are often purely ethnic, we used interviewers who had both first-hand experience with the Black community and the academic world. The interviewers were asked to rate each applicant on their "hipness" as manifested by the personal interview, plus, personal written statements they had provided the Admissions office. It was impossible to precisely define "hipness" so an alternate mechanism was developed to give the decisions an objective base--inter-rater reliability was used to provide the kind of objectivity that other criteria could not. Applicants invited to the campus were independently subjected to both the new rating scheme as well as the regular admissions procedure. As might be expected in the case of two different sets of criteria, the groups of students selected did not coincide. This presented the possibility of comparing the performance of the groups. Out of thirty-nine black students admitted, eighteen were selected by the regular procedure but not by the new; fourteen by both. Seven students were selected by the new procedure but rejected by the regular.

At the end of the first semester, there was no appreciable difference in the distribution of grade point averages between the three groups, even though the "new" group differed greatly in academic background.

Grade Point Averages	Experimental	Both	Traditional
Above 3.34	0	0	0
2.34 to 3.33	57	43	39
1.34 to 2.33	14	36	39
Below 1.34	29	21	22
	n = 7	n = 14	n = 18

For illustrative purposes, we have included the SAT scores for each of these groups.

	Experimental	Both	Traditional
Verbal	444	544	592
Mathematical	444	490	517

While these reflect only summary impressions, they seem, in general, in accord with other research done on this subject. As we increase the number of students in each group, we plan a more systematic analysis of their total progression during their stay on campus. We are particularly interested in seeing whether the grade patterns noted in the first semester can be maintained or improved upon by the "hip" student in future work. Other questions to be answered are: Do specific courses contribute to moving the grade point average upward or especially downward? Are the student and academic advisory services adequate and if not, how can they be improved?

Particularly, in light of Humphreys findings, is there "indeed ample basis for discontent with procedures concerned with placing students on probation and dropping students from college for academic deficiencies"?

In total, there are immense tasks and responsibilities facing private colleges and universities as they go about eliminating present racial and economic barriers to education. It is also clear, that extreme care is required in establishing educational arrangements intended to achieve this goal. Sound analysis and research should invariably accompany the range of approaches used for this purpose. To this end, we believe that Oberlin's efforts to expand its level and quality of educational opportunity is a worthy and creative endeavor.

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